

## Marnie's Freudian Sexuality

Throughout Alfred Hitchcock's oeuvre, he exemplifies the prominent theme of sexuality and the influence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. This theme is most prominent in *Marnie* (1964) where the main character, Marnie, steals large sums of money from employers due to her troubled past. Marnie does not feel love from her mother, so she tries to win her love by providing her with money to live off of as well as buying her lavish gifts. She also does not want to be touched by men in any way. *Marnie* takes a very animalistic approach to sexuality, exemplifying how Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides reason for one's unconscious motivational actions. Hitchcock's Freudian influences can be noted in several of his films, and it seems to define his reasons for doing things the way he did.

Hitchcock said in his interview with François Truffaut that he liked the story of *Marnie* because of its fetishism. Hitchcock says, "A man wants to go to bed with a thief because she is a thief, just like other men have a yen for a Chinese or a colored woman" (Truffaut 301). From this we can see that Mark, the main male character in *Marnie*, has a perverse sexual desire for Marnie because of her bad behavior. His desire is taboo, because men are supposed to want a decent, caring, good-natured woman, right? Marnie's behavior is caused by the fact that she has a suppressed memory of murdering a man who was hurting her "Momma" when she was just a little girl. Even though she does not remember the traumatic incident, it has affected her behavior her whole life. She has never wanted a man to touch her. She has never had a boyfriend. When Mark tries to touch her, she screams, "NO!" She doesn't realize until later why she acts this way.

Freud's thoughts about human sexuality begin in early childhood. He believed that humans are not born pure and then are corrupted into being perverse sexual beings as they mature, but rather they are born impure and fight these instincts their whole lives, and only partially overcome them (Fancher 145). Freud divided sexual development into three stages: the oral stage, the anal stage, and the phallic stage. The oral stage starts in early infancy when an infant takes pleasure in feeding, and this pleasure is not just because he obtains nourishment, but is truly a sexual pleasure because he also takes great pleasure in sucking on objects that do not give him nourishment, such as his thumb or a pacifier. This behavior is sexual in nature because adults demonstrate oral responses with sexual connotations through perversions, neuroses, and latent dream thoughts (Fancher 155). This perverse enjoyment of

oral or anal stimulation in adult life comes from the early enjoyment a young child gets from these same stimulations.

Freud also puts a large amount of meaning on dreams. Every dream has a meaning, whether it is a secret desire or the outlet of a repressed memory, such as in Marnie's case. Every dream has manifest and latent content. The manifest content is the conscious portion, and is seen as unimportant in the interpretation of the dream. The latent content is the unconscious desires of the individual, and can be seen through symbolism in the manifest content (Wilson). Marnie has a recurring dream of the night when she murdered the sailor to save her Momma from harm. Her dream always starts with a tapping sound, which signifies the sailor's knocking on her mother's door. She does not want to get out of bed, and she has a cold feeling. Symbolism can be seen through the red suffusions, which indicate the blood that was everywhere after the murder took place. Her dreams are brought on by thunderstorms, because there was a storm the night of the incident, and that is why the sailor came out to comfort her. Marnie does not realize why she has these dreams or what causes them, because the memory of the murder is suppressed into her unconscious because it is too horrible for her conscious mind to bear. Once she can remember what happened to her, she is able to deal with it and hopefully move past her fear of men touching her.

Freud also puts heavy emphasis on the Oedipus complex, in which a young boy has sexual desires for his mother and wants to kill off his father to marry his mother. This theory can also be seen in girls, which is now known as the Electra complex, although Freud did not coin the term. According to Freud, this is a normal desire that all children go through, but what if the child does not have a parent of the opposite sex in which to desire? This is Marnie's case. She has never known a father, and she therefore struggles to develop any desire for men. The only experiences she ever had with men were the customers that her prostitute mother brought in. When the sailor tried to comfort her, she exclaimed, "Get away from me! I want my Momma!" She was not used to affection from men, and she did not like it. As a result of the horrible incident and her mother's treatment of men throughout her childhood (Momma says, "Decent women don't have need for any man") Marnie grows up without any desire or need for men, and any desire she could have is thwarted by her mother's hatred towards all men. She is also scared of them touching her, because sex has a negative connotation and is exactly the thing that hurt her Momma and led Marnie to commit murder when she was just a little girl. The fact that she experienced such trauma during her psychosexual development stage led her to have neurosis in her adult life.

Mark's true desire is studying animal instincts, more specifically predator's instincts. He says that criminals are the predators of the human world, and this explains why he is so attracted to Marnie, because Marnie is a criminal. He even reads a book later on entitled, "Sexual Apparitions of the Criminal Female." This is Hitchcock's humorous way of showing the viewer that Mark is trying to get to the bottom of why Marnie does not desire

him sexually. This just makes him want her even more, because in the animal kingdom, it is all about the chase. We want what we cannot have. He even blackmails her into marrying him, just like Alicia is forced into marrying Alex in order to spy on him in *Notorious*, by telling her that it is either him or the police. He says his father will understand their quick marriage because of “wholesome animal lust.” Mark’s fetish for the “bad girl” is explained by the fact that he desires to get Marnie to trust him, just like he does with all animals. He wants to conquer her and make her his own. His life has been straightforward, always doing what is expected of him, and never really getting to succumb to his own animalistic desires, but going to bed with a “lady animal” like Marnie is exactly what he needs to fulfill his deepest fantasies.

Aside from being simply interested in Marnie’s animalistic qualities, Mark’s own problems play a key role in the development of their relationship. Mark grew up without a mother, just as Marnie grew up without a father. Both Mark and Marnie’s childhoods tend to greatly affect their adult life. Mark has dealt with his own difficult past. When Marnie asks him what has happened to him, he replies with, “The old sad story. Promising youth blighted, dragged down by money, position, noblesse oblige.” This “noble obligation” that he is referring to is the fact that he was forced to take over his father’s company in order to save it. Susan, the office worker, tells Marnie that in the first week Mark was at Rutland’s, he “retired three board members, the acting president, the president’s secretary, and the secretary’s secretary.” He is paying for his father’s mistakes just as Marnie pays for her mother’s mistakes. Just as Mark has trained his jaguarundi to trust him, he tries to gain the trust of Marnie to figure out what happened to her so that she can accept it and move on with her life. Mark lost his wife, but is able to cope with it and move on. He and his father practically raised Lil, Mark’s sister in law, and it is clear throughout the film that Lil is thirsting for Mark’s affection, but she does not get it.

Marnie’s feeling of inadequacy towards her mother is exemplified in her double, Jessie. Jessie is a little blonde haired girl that Momma babysits. Momma even claims that Jessie reminds her of Marnie. It is very evident that Marnie is jealous of little Jessie. She seems very annoyed when Jessie is around, and Jessie and Marnie compete for Momma’s attention. Jessie tells Marnie that Momma is making a pecan pie just for her, and when Marnie gives Momma the beautiful mink fur, Jessie steals the spotlight away from Marnie by reminding Momma that she needs to have her hair brushed before going home. Marnie feels that her mother has never loved her, and feels like she is being replaced by Jessie. In Momma’s eyes, Jessie is the sweet innocent girl she always wanted, the one that did not murder a man like Marnie did; even though Marnie was only doing what she thought would save her mother. This idea of the double is also present in *Vertigo*, where Scottie falls in love with Madeleine and tries to recreate her after her death through Judy, a girl who looks like Madeleine. He has her hair dyed blonde and put up in a twist and has a grey suit tailored for her just like that of Madeleine’s. His deep love for Madeleine causes him to recreate her

posthumously in another. We, of course, find out that Judy and Madeleine are the same person, which, upon losing his beloved “Madeleine” a second time, only adds to Scottie’s hysteria.

Marnie doesn’t know why her Momma doesn’t love her, but later we find out why. Her Momma undoubtedly has resentment toward Marnie, because she murdered the sailor long ago. Bernice Edgar may not blame Marnie for what happened that night, but Marnie represents for her the constant reminder of her rough past, and also takes away Marnie’s childish innocence. She is always pushing Marnie to be “decent,” exactly what Bernice was not. Even at the end of the film, when the secret is out and Marnie now believes that her mother really does love her, Momma still cannot allow Marnie to lay her head in her lap. She reaches down to touch Marnie’s hair, but she cannot bring herself to do it. She then tells her to get up because she’s hurting her leg. Mark then fixes Marnie’s hair. “Like many of Hitchcock’s protagonists, Marnie finally leaves a parent who is no longer adequate (in Mrs. Edgar’s case, never was) and turns to a partner with whom she can find adult love and make a home of her own” (Brill 266). She needs to feel love and affection in an adult relationship, which is something she’s never experienced before because of her fear and distaste for men, but now that she understands why she feels this way, she can cope with it and overcome it. This idea is also present in *The Birds*, where Melanie Daniels is undoubtedly a doppelganger for Mrs. Brennar, Mitch’s mother. Mitch’s falling in love with Melanie is Mitch’s way of finally growing up and moving on with an adult partner of his own.

Along with Freudian sexuality comes animalistic qualities. Just like when Mark mentions “wholesome animal lust” to refer to his desire to go to bed with Marnie, this also can be seen through the actual animals in the film: Marnie’s horse, Forio, and Mark’s cat, the jaguarundi. Mark has trained this animal to trust him, and he plans to do the same with Marnie. Later when he rides Forio, he claims that he does not like horses, but he will ride them because he has their trust. “It is a suggestive parallel to Marnie’s affection for her horse Forio that the widowed Mark should have framed on his desk, in the spot usually reserved for a picture of wife and children, a photo of this big snarling cat” (Brill 247). Both Mark and Marnie show affection and love to animals as a replacement for the lack of love for another human.

Marnie has a very deep connection with her beloved horse, Forio. “Only when riding her horse or when jolted by events that evoke her past is she herself” (Brill 251). She is only truly free and happy when she is atop her horse. She refers to Forio as her “Darling,” and she even tells him, “If you want to bite somebody, bite me!” Forio is the outlet of her subconscious sexual desires, and her love for him replaces that of a normal love of a woman for a man. The look in her eyes is very telling when Mark buys Forio for her. She looks at Mark, truly happy and appreciative. She grabs Forio’s mane and hops on him and gallops off. This is her version of a sexual release. Instead of having relations with a man, she instead has a tight and intimate bond with her horse. This inhibits her from having a normal

sexual relationship with Mark. Marnie's shooting of her severely injured horse is a way for her to remove her outlet of sexuality and allow for her to have the possibility to find that special connection with Mark later on.

Marnie has stolen several thousands of dollars from her previous employers as a result of her troubled past and feelings of a loveless relationship with her mother. Marion Crane in *Psycho* also steals \$40,000 from her boss in order to run away from her problems. This "femme fatale" approach is seen in many of Hitchcock's works, in which the beautiful woman uses her sexual appeal to get what she wants. Marion's boss trusts her with \$40,000 in cash, and she uses that fact to take his money and get out of town. She keeps the car salesman from acting on his suspicion about her car trade and large sum of cash in her purse because she is so beautiful. Marnie uses her sexual appeal to get a job without having any references. Strutt refers to her pulling down her skirt to cover her knees like they were some sort of "national treasure." The Hitchcock blonde is present in nearly every one of Hitchcock's films, and she always has a very sexual air to her. She is very elegantly dressed, most commonly in heels and a nice tailored skirt suit, with hair very neat. She flaunts her confidence to the men in the film that desire her. Marnie is no exception. She knows she is pretty and uses this to her advantage. Her mother tells her, "Men and a good name don't go together" because she thinks her hair is too blonde, but the fact that she is desirable to men is exactly what lands her access to the money. The men in the film regard her as a sexual object, and Mark first refers to her as "The one with the legs."

Hitchcock uses visual devices and expressionism throughout *Marnie* to evoke emotion in the eyes of the viewer. Suffusions of red can be seen when she sees the gladiolas against the white curtains, in her nightmares, when she spills red ink on her white blouse, whenever it storms, the jockey's red and white silks at the race track, and the red coats she sees at the fox hunt. Although these suffusions of red are viewed by some as phony and unnecessary, they are meant to be looked at as, "Romances with an emphasis on psychologizing rather than psychological case studies with a narrative sugar coating" (Brill 241). In other words, the film is about the romance, and the psychological undertones are there to add to the love story. This falsehood is central to the character type of Marnie, who is quite phony herself. She puts on an act with most people throughout the entire film. The first time we see her face is right after she has just washed out her black dye to reveal her golden blonde hair. The phony things in the film just add to the idea that Marnie is phony herself. She has to put on an act in order to hide her criminal record and her haunting past. "The credits emphasize the 'storiness' of what is to follow by appearing in one of Hollywood's most hackneyed title props, turning book pages" (Brill 242). This visual style is also quite prevalent in *The Lodger*, with the emphasis on "to-night golden curls" and the triangle that signifies the Avenger.

Another expressionistic tool Hitchcock uses in *Marnie* is the divided two-shot. On the right side of the screen, we see Marnie stealing money from the safe at Rutland's, and on

the other side, we see a cleaning lady hurriedly scrubbing the floor. This adds suspense, because we are sure that Marnie will get caught stealing the money. We know something Marnie does not know, and we wish that we could warn her. She tries to escape by putting her shoes in her pockets and tiptoeing out, but a shoe falls out of her pocket onto the floor. She does not get caught though because the cleaning lady is deaf. The cleaning lady seems to double Marnie's mother, who tries to clean up her guilty conscience but transfers that guilt onto her daughter. Marnie's way of revenge is to steal money from powerful men, because powerful men used to use her mother for sex (Allen 196-197). This expressive shot can also be seen in *Blackmail* when Alice is undressing on one side of the screen, and Mr. Crewe, the artist, plays the piano on the other. We feel like the voyeur in this scene, because we are watching Alice undress, without her knowledge, and seeing a woman undress on the screen was taboo in that time period. The fact that we see her slipping into a tutu reflects exactly what is on the artist's mind – his sexual desire.

Some view *Marnie* as the bubbling up of all of Hitchcock's emotional problems. During the shooting of *Marnie*, Hitchcock and his screen writer, Evan Hunter, had a disagreement about the rape scene on the honeymoon. Hunter said, "I didn't want to write that scene for him, and I told Hitchcock so. I thought it would break sympathy for the character of the man, and it's totally unmotivated. But Hitch said he wanted it in the film, and he insisted that at the exact moment of the rape he wanted the camera right on her shocked face" (Spoto 469). Hitchcock fired Hunter because of this disagreement and hired a woman, Jay Presson Allen. The fact that Mark raped Marnie is rather out of character for him, since he promised that he would not touch her. However, the fact that he is so overcome with animalistic impulses goes along with Freud's theory of animalistic desires causing things that we may not be consciously aware of. Mark clearly was not in his right mind when he raped Marnie, he was drunk and succumbed to his desire of "wholesome animal lust." Although Mark's actions are not very sympathetic to most viewers, Marnie is his wife after all, and he is seen as the bad guy because he wants what every man wants from his wife.

Hitchcock uses Freudian ideas in many of his films, and these ideas add to the plot of the stories. He gives reason for the characters' subconscious desires and explains why they act in the way that they do. In *Marnie*, Marnie's sexuality is very troubled due to her traumatic past. Mark desires Marnie in an animalistic way to succumb to his deepest unconscious desires to go to bed with a bad girl, one that society tells him not to want. Once Marnie is aware of her oppressed memory, she can begin to accept and overcome it, and finally move on with her husband to lead a life, happily ever after.

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